Observer Charges Viet Voting Fraud

9/22/67

By John Maffre
Washington Post Staff Writer

An unofficial observer charged yesterday that South Vietnam's presidential election was shot through with fraud, partly because the U.S. mission played too passive a role.

The accuser was Prof. David Wurfel; political scientist at the University of Missouri; who observed for four groups that have criticized U.S. policy in Vietnam: the Methodist Peace Division, SANE, the Friends Committee on National Legislation, and the Unitarian-Universalist Association.

He told one newsman it would not be "appropriate" to say that on-the-spot newsmen and President Johnson's observers had been brainwashed, because they found the elections to be generally fair. But he felt they had not dug as deeply behind the scenes as he had.

Of the score of observers named by the President, Wurfel said:

"They were shielded from the kind of contacts and information that would have raised doubts in their minds."

It would be folly for U.S. policy to be based on the results of an election that had disheartened so many Vietnamese, he said, because there was no longer any hope for the United States of creating a viable non-Communist state there.

"To continue the war would be complete futility," he said. "The only basis for building a peace is to recognize the National Liberation Front, and to permit the participation of all political forces of South Vietnam in the Saigon government."

Although he acknowledged that documentary evidence of fraud was scanty and extremely hard to find; he said that it produced perhaps 300,000 to 500,000 extra votes. "In addition there were thousands of votes produced by pressure exerted by the government through the military and the civil service."

Wurfel said his observing and checking from Aug. 14 to Sept. 10 was done in Saigon, the heavily populated province of Giadinh surrounding it and the Mekong Delta province of Phongdinh, the three areas having about three million people. Saigon and all 45 provinces have about 16 million people.

One photostat that Wurfel showed newsmen as evidence of fraud depicted two pairs of voting cards in Giadinh Province, each pair issued to the same two women, meaning that they could vote twice instead of once. He said later he had not seen the cards shown in the photostat, which was given to him by a trusted Vietnamese friend, and that he had not sought to question the women whose names and addresses were on the cards.

Wurfel said that South Vietnamese cynics felt the Central Intelligence Agency had backed peace candidate Truong Dinh Dzu, whom he described as having a "shady reputation," in an effort to kill the peace movement. "And this has happened," he said.

Wurfel said he did not know whether to believe this, but added that there was some logic that Dzu and Pham Huy Co would get CIA backing for the purpose of testing the war and peace sentiment."

Dzu surprised everybody by coming in second with 1.2 per cent of the vote. Co, a northern-born Buddhist and veteran campaigner regarded as a hawk, was second to last in the field of 11 presidential candidates with 2.2 per cent of the vote.